

102 S. Buffalo Street Warsaw, Indiana



The week before Christmas 2012, Warsaw City Hall moved to 102 S. Buffalo Street. City staff and a planning committee finalized details for an open house May 11, 2013. In conjunction with this celebration, the following historical chronology of the City Hall building was compiled by Michelle Bormet, assistant to Mayor Thallemer, with comments by some former First National Bank employees and building tenants.

For many years, the corner of Center and Buffalo Streets was used as a reference point for giving directions within the City. Warsaw's first brick building was constructed in 1849 on the southwest corner of Center and Buffalo Streets by George Moon and William Cosgrove, both future mayors of Warsaw. In the early 1900s, the main floor of the two-story building was occupied by the F.P. Bradway and Son grocery store, with Ernest Van Osdol's dental office on the second floor.

At some point in time, prominent physician Dr. Jacob Boss purchased the original brick building. After his death in 1874, Boss' daughter and son-in-law, Louise and Wilbur Maish, assumed ownership. Wilbur Maish founded Little Crow Milling Company in Warsaw, later known as Little Crow Foods.

That three-story structure was razed in 1911, along with two smaller buildings to the west on Center Street. A larger, three-story building (the current structure) was then built for the Indiana Loan and Trust Company, which took occupancy in 1912. The bank and several stores leased the first floor. Offices on the second floor were occupied by a number of attorneys and physicians. The third floor was used as a lodge for the Fraternal Order of Eagles for a number of years until they built a new lodge on E. Center Street in 1930.

Indiana Loan & Trust merged with the State Bank of Warsaw in 1930 and became known as the Indiana State Bank and Trust Company. However, the Great Depression caused financial difficulties and the bank closed after two years.

By 1937, there was a new tenant for the large building on this well-known corner. First National Bank of Warsaw had been organized and opened its doors in May with Arthur I. Nelson as president. Judge Donald Vanderveer served as president from 1963 to 1965. FNB president W. Robert Hall oversaw a major renovation of the building in the late 1960s during his tenure (1965-1970), which included the marble façade that exists today.

As a side note, the bank building was designated by the Office of Civil Defense as a fallout shelter in the 1960s when Americans were concerned about a nuclear attack. Fallout shelters were a place people could go to avoid exposure to harmful fallout from a nuclear blast.

Due to continued growth, in 1966 the bank leased the first floor of the building next door to the south, formerly occupied by Gilworth's department store and later Fitch's Jewelry. First National Bank's Trust Department occupied the first floor next door for about five years, and then negotiated the purchase of the building in 1972 for further expansion.

The bank also purchased the two-story brick building further south along the alley, known as the Saine building, which was constructed in 1877 by Allan Saine. By the 1960s, that property was owned by John D. Widaman II, whose grandfather married Allan Saine's daughter. Both buildings were demolished for construction of a new two-story addition.

John Elliott, former Senior Vice President and Trust Officer (FNB employee from 1971 to 1999), still has one of the letter openers made by the Dirilyte Division of Hand Industries that was handed out at the open house which took place for one week in October, 1974. Crystal dishes were given as promotional gifts to anyone opening new deposit accounts. Elliott recalls the time he went into the bank one Saturday morning when it was closed and was startled to find former governor Otis R. Bowen sitting in the lobby. Elliott quickly learned that employee Carol Mikesell had let "Doc" in, when she happily announced that they were getting married.

Vice chairman of the board Ross Sitler treated employees to a steak dinner at the Shrine Building when the bank reached \$100 million in assets in 1979. Richard Snodgrass, former assistant vice president, recalls that he dressed up as Sammy Davis, Jr. and Rosemary Bumgardner was Phyllis Diller at the celebration party. Snodgrass (employed by FNB from 1969 to 2000) was chosen from nominations by fellow bank employees to receive FNB's first Golden Dome Award for his community service.

At the time of this major expansion project, First National Bank also purchased property further west on Center Street, which had been the site of Sharp Hardware Company since about 1915. That three-story brick building was demolished to make way for the bank's parking lot. FNB also acquired the one-story brick building further to the west. It was left intact at that time, but was removed in late 2012 to expand the current parking lot. The front brick façade still stands at the northwest corner of the parking lot.

Following major renovations to connect the existing building to the two-story addition, the bank's board room was moved to the second floor of the new section. For a number of years, various professional offices occupied the second floor of the original bank building. J.C. Paxton, who served as secretary to the board of directors, noted from minutes that one of the law offices was Rockhill, Kennedy, Pinnick, Sand, Bent and Pequinot.

William E. Hadley served as the bank's president from 1970 to 1974. Neal M. Carlson began employment at FNB in 1955 and was elected president in 1974. When Carlson retired in 1990, Willis Alt, who began his career at FNB in 1970, served as president during a number of corporate mergers. He ended his banking career when the several bank charters were merged into National City Bank of Indiana in November of 1998.

Former employee Sue Charlton stated that the First National Bank employees were a very special, caring group who helped each other and worked well together. Fort Wayne National Corporation purchased First National Bank of Warsaw in 1988, with its last day of business being December 31, 1999, before National City Bank took over. The last acquisition was by PNC Bank.

George Brennan, who operates a global orthopedic device personnel search business, rented the corner office on the second floor from 1999 to 2010. He stated that Valentine's Day was a special treat for him, as he could watch men scurrying to the nearby jewelry store and floral shop to buy last-minute gifts.

Commencing back in 1911, the corner property was subject to a 99-year lease from the Maish family, the last lessee being PNC Bank. The Maish family did not renew a lease with PNC, which led to their decision to relocate. As part of the lease termination, in 2010 the Maishes purchased the property of the adjoining two-story addition. This consolidation of the property opened the door for sale of the entire half block.

After having been vacant for about three months, City of Warsaw officials became aware that the property was for sale. They reviewed the City's needs for space and usability, and proceeded to negotiate acquiring the property. The Warsaw Redevelopment Commission was the governing board to sign all the legal documentation and bonds. Coincidentally, former FNB employee Richard Snodgrass was serving as president of the Warsaw Redevelopment Commission at the time of purchase and was a signatory.

The Maish family owned this well-known property for more than 135 years. The City of Warsaw purchased the property in 2010. Bidding for renovation of the first and second floors took place at the end of 2011, and reconstruction work extended throughout 2012. City offices moved into the newly refurbished building the week before Christmas, 2012.

Now a century after the 3-story structure was built, this popular corner has new life as Warsaw's City Hall. The contemporary interior design will serve the City well for many years to come. A main focal point in the lobby, however, is a vintage 13-foot long, double-sided oak bench that was originally in the Warsaw Train Depot. It had been in storage for many years and was refurbished to bring back to use once again.

Today, the Clerk-Treasurer and Wastewater Payment offices are on the north end of the building, with windows facing Center Street. The Council Chambers occupies the entire first floor of the two-story section to the south. On the second floor, the Mayor's office and Human Resources are on the north end, while the Building and Planning Department occupies the entire south end of the two-story section.

